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## **Anthony SOARES (ed.), *Towards a Portuguese Postcolonialism***

University of Bristol, Department of Hispanic, Portuguese & Latin  
American Studies, 2006, 236 p.

**Ingemai Larsen**



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## REFERENCES

Anthony SOARES (ed.), *Towards a Portuguese Postcolonialism*, University of Bristol, Department of Hispanic, Portuguese & Latin American Studies, 2006, 236 p., ISBN: 0-9553922-4-1 ("Lusophone Studies", 4).

- 1 Among the various anthologies and dossiers on Portuguese topics currently being published the Lusophone Studies hosted at the University of Bristol have dedicated two out of four volumes to specific postcolonial issues, despite the fact that their general field of study is the histories, literatures and cultures of the entire Portuguese-speaking world. This in itself indicated the intensified awareness of postcolonial issues in Portuguese studies. Furthermore, it seems to oppose the popular mantra of many an introduction and conclusion formulated by the Portuguese-speaking postcolonialists who maintain that postcolonial topics are lamentably neglected. Other established reiterations include, on the one hand, a complaint that postcolonial studies in general are dominated by Anglophone theories which do not take into account the specificities of the Portuguese-speaking world, and, on the other hand, an objection that 'international' comparative studies avoid Portugal.
- 2 Exactly such criticisms are found in this volume, *Towards a Portuguese Postcolonialism*, of course not completely without reason. Considering that the point of departure for the grand majority of Lusophone postcolonialists continues to be (the seminal) Prospero-and-Caliban-essay, originated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the disapprovals are pertinent and need to be voiced – leading the way, hopefully, to the much needed comparative

approach rather than reiterating the Lusophone context. The volume at hand, however, to some extent falls short of recognising the progress already made.

- 3 The contribution of Paulo de Medeiros diplomatically deals with the strengths and potential weaknesses of Sousa Santos' also quite provocative affirmations, but contains a more interesting part which is an examination of Germano Almeida's *O Testamento do Senhor Napumoceno*, José Eduardo Agualusa's *Nação Crioula* and António Lobo Antunes' *O Esplendor de Portugal*. The discussion give evidence to the fact that 'centre' is a relative notion, situated anywhere between Cape Verde and Paris depending on the postcolonial context in which it is applied. Thus, Medeiros succeeds in problematizing "the question of the all-too-readily accepted dichotomy between centre and periphery" (p. 39).
- 4 Far less diplomatic or rather refreshingly outspoken is Phillip Rothwell opening his reading of Pepetelas Jaime Bunda e a Morte do Americano with the announcement that "if postcolonial studies is to mean anything at all, it should always make us feel uncomfortable" (p. 91). He then proceeds in a highly erudite, sharp and, occasionally, hermetic analyses in which, not least, American hypocrisy and Angolan cynics are mercilessly impaled.
- 5 Maria Carrilho is to be praised for her attempt to care for a corner of the Portuguese postcolonial literature known to few of us, the literature of East Timor. However, a more pronounced methodological basis may well have supported her reading; at least it would have substantiated it had she considered the implications of reading poems as if they were historical documents. As a matter of fact, Carmen Ramos Villars faces the same challenge in her analysis of the Azorean writer Eduardo Bettencourt Pinto – a task otherwise nicely performed. And a similar lack of explicit methodological considerations are noted in David Brookshaw's appealing study of the works of José Eduardo Agualusa; one may rightly call attention to the fact that, on several occasions, the author has expressed opinions directly mirrored in his fiction; still it remains a problem to read a literary (fictional and aesthetically informed) book as if it were a documentary text. A matching observation must be made in relation to the second part of the long and thorough contribution by Anthony Soares concerning Celso Oliveira's collection of poems *Timor-Leste. Chegou a liberdade*. We are, no doubt, presented with a local variation of "poesia de combate" and, thus, we are obliged to apply a contextualized interpretation – still it seems that the analyses here mentioned would be even more interesting if methodological tools were more overtly discussed.
- 6 Hillary Owen diligently leads us through Lília Mompote's short stories as does John Kinsella in his analysis of João de Melo's *Autópsia de um Mar de Ruínas*, which also offers a relevant discussion of the still urgent question of language. Also, Daniel Zubía Fernández offers a sensible account of Antunes' *O Esplendor de Portugal*.
- 7 The volume is edited by Anthony Soares, who clearly possesses an impressive knowledge of the general field of postcolonialism and who also skilfully enters into a fruitful dialogue with Boaventura de Sousa Santos. This in itself adds quality to the publication.

May 2008